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ABSTRACT

Originally presented to a high school faculty surveyed on student cheating, this paper serves as a teachers' guide to preventing cheating and dealing with cheating incidents. An introduction cites figures indicating that cheating is widespread and urges teachers to impress upon students the seriousness and offensiveness of cheating. The first part of the paper offers suggestions for the prevention of cheating on tests and assignments, recommending that teachers (1) tell students what constitutes cheating and what consequences are possible; (2) monitor test materials, classroom environment, and patterns of student behavior; and (3) structure assignments so as to discourage cheating. The remainder of the paper addresses responses to cheating. After a working definition of the serious cheating incident, advice is given on how to confront a student suspected of cheating and how to contact parents of students who have cheated. Teacher guidelines for selecting a response to cheating and a list of alternative responses conclude the paper. (MJL)

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NOTES ON CHEATING
FOR THE BUSY CLASSROOM TEACHER

These notes were presented to the faculty of Sunset High School in Beaverton, Oregon by Berk Moss the Staff Development Specialist. They were prepared following a review of the current literature on cheating, a survey conducted by the student government and a few follow-up interviews. These notes are not intended to be a scholarly paper but a summary of use to a busy but concerned (desperate?) teacher.

IS CHEATING A PROBLEM IN YOUR CLASS?

It is no suprise to experienced teachers that national surveys indicate cheating in the classroom is a problem in schools and colleges. We are often shocked by the casual attitude students have formed about cheating. One study found that over 75% of entering college freshmen felt cheating was a normal part of life. (References are listed at the end of this paper)

In a survey done of 228 students at Sunset, 70% admitted to copying homework, 49% to plagiarizing(but see below), 47% to obtaining labs, tests or other work from students who had taken the course previously. Over half had copied answers from another student's test. About one quarter had used a stolen copy of a test. About half had changed answers when tests were corrected in class. Almost two-thirds had communicated with other people during a test. Well over half had used crib notes on a test. Over 40% had cheated on a semester exam. These results are not significantly different from those found in national surveys.

In interviews, Sunset students suggest that teachers have not impressed them that cheating is a serious matter. If we are seen as being inattentive to cheating and its prevention, we promote an attitude that we don't care and we teach students that cheating is a way they can achieve success. Such attitudes in our young people have grave implications for our society.

Even if we are only partially successful at stopping cheating, we must let our students know we are concerned and that we find cheating repugnant. We must let them know that catching cheaters is not part of a game where we shake hands when it is all done. They must understand that cheating is offensive to all a teacher stands for, that our basic motivation for going into teaching as a profession is offended when students cheat.

Moving off this philosophical level and concentrating on practical day-to-day practices, we have gathered some thoughts and procedures which may apply to you and your classes which may help you prevent and deal with cheating.

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PREVENTION OF CHEATING

Tell your students that you will react to cheating, that you consider it a matter of grave importance. List possible teacher consequences from minor to most major, including recommendation for suspension. (See menu of possible responses below)

Don't assume that things which staff members consider cheating will be considered cheating by even honest students. Such perceptions differ and are the source of frustration both to staff and students <see article by Barnett in references>.

> In the Sunset survey discussed above, the following percentages thought the indicated practice WAS NOT cheating: copying homework 47%, plagiarizing 38%(but see below), obtaining asignments from previous students 31%, communicating with other people during a test 35%.

Tell your students what you define as cheating. Clarify your statements with examples.

> Tell your students which types of behavior seem to indicate cheating: looking away from your test paper, having a pattern of missing tests, having a pattern of turning work in late.
>
> Explain terms like plagiarism. When we attempted to confirm the results of the Sunset survey by interviewing a few students we found that over 80% couldn't describe what plagiarism is. (The other parts of the survey were confirmed)

Tell students that all serious instances of cheating will be reported to the administrative vice principal, who will inform teachers of students who have developed a pattern of cheating. (See RESPONSES TO CHEATING below for details and our definition of serious cheating.)

Remind students that they will be looking for recommendations for college, the armed services or employment in the near future. Students who have been involved in cheating will have a difficult time finding teachers to give the needed recommendations.

Remind students that if they have a history of cheating, consequences will also be set by the administration.

TESTING

From the time you start drafting a test, be conscious of where you keep it and who has access.

> This includes your typed copy, any printed copies, previous tests if substantially similiar, your test key, and tests filled in by students in previous classes.
> We have had instances of students stealing tests from the desks, briefcases, file cabinets, and the library printing area. If students (even aides) have access to the test or the answer key, answers will be passed along.

Try to use test formats which make cheating difficult. Essays, multi-form multiple choice, etc.

Try, where possible, to provide a seating arrangement which inhibits cheating.

Move desks around.

Move to the cafeteria or other large room if possible.

Have students sit with their backs to you so they don't know when you're looking at them. Either turn the desks around or sit in the back of the room yourself.

Be alert during the testing period. Students report many teachers miss blatant cheating through inattention. This causes a great deal of frustration on the part of honest students.

Be alert to where students keep other papers, pee-chees, etc. A number of students say that such things placed next to a desk or in the side rack have notes written on them.

Watch students who get up and move around the room. Other students suspect them of looking for answers.

Students claim to be able to pass answer sheets of multiple choice tests around and students who think they know answers fill in sections they are confident about for friends.

Students say that some people will attempt to get an extra page of a test to give to a friend who has the class later in the day. This person may simply review the questions or he/she may actually fill in the test and pass it in when he/she takes the test. In other cases students have photocopied the page(s) and sold them to others.

Keep track of students who are absent on test days.

Give them a different test or a different type of test. Change objective to essay, or oral exam.

Be obvious about your attention to students who miss test days. Feel free to phone home the afternoon of the test to ask about the student's absence. Say something like this: "This is Tom Tester of Sunset High School. I'm calling because Susan wasn't in our government class today and missed a test and I think it is important to check on such absences. Can you tell me if she was at home?" Many parents will be interested to know that their student seems to be absent on many days with tests. When students know you are this concerned, the number of absences on test days will drop.

If you have a student who deals with unpleasant situations by

being ill or otherwise absent, attempt to help him/her to see other ways to meet challenges. This may be one of the most important things you can teach this student.

After testing and going over your test with a class, collect the corrected copies from the students so next year/ next semester's students won't get a copy.

Some teachers don't consider looking over previous tests to be cheating. If you feel this way, give previous tests to all students. It is unfair to have only some students have access to old tests.

ASSIGNMENTS

In some cases you can structure your assignments so that cheating is discouraged.

Assignments which require analysis rather than just reporting of information from a resource or text are less prone to plagiarism

Ask for drafts, outlines etc. to show the work was developed by the student.

As you work with lower ability students, remember they need more structure in long term assignments: use more interim check points to avoid last minute panic which may lead to cheating.

When you make a major assignment, let the students know what you consider cheating:

working in groups?
copying from books?
getting help from parents?

When collecting assignments put them away as soon as you've collected them so they can't be taken by a student who has yet to do the assignment.

RESPONSES TO CHEATING INCIDENTS:

There can be no uniform response to cheating because there is no uniform incident of cheating. (Does copying a single problem on a math homework assignment deserve the same response as turning in a five week metals project which was partially the work of another student?)

The committee looking into the problem of cheating at Sunset High School came up with a working definition of a serious example of cheating. We considered an incident serious if the teacher's response was to take a disciplinary action, to change the grade the student received on the material or in the class, to ask the student to redo an assignment or retake a test, to contact the parent, or otherwise take a positive action. Non-serious responses would include changing a student's seat, reminding the student to keep his eyes on his paper.

Remember, we have established a policy that if you take any of the above serious actions, you should report the incident to the administrative vice principal. This will allow you to receive information about previous problems this student may have had with cheating and will allow the vice principal to have the information for other teachers should there be a future problem.

This clearinghouse of information is important. It is sometimes too easy to say "I won't report this. I'll give you one more chance." If this happens, a student may be getting "one more chance" from 18 teachers while here at Sunset.

> This was pointed out vividly when three Sunset teachers were talking one day about cheating and one told of confronting a girl who promptly dissolved into tears and ran out of the room. Later the teacher got a note saying he was her favorite teacher and she would never,never do such a thing again. The two teachers hearing the story had the same letter from the same girl earlier in the year.

THOUGHTS ON HOW TO CONFRONT A STUDENT

It is never easy to confront a student when cheating is suspected. Make the contact in private. Be business like, deal with the specifics of the situation first. When you've settled these you should clearly state that such behavior is unacceptable.
Try to focus on the behavior that leads you to suspect cheating. Don't say "I saw you cheating." Say, "I saw you looking in your notebook."

Confront the student in a reasonably timely manner after an incident, but don't act until you've thought through the matter:

What evidence do I have? What did I see? What does the student's paper tell me?

What do I know about this student?

Were other students involved?

When you confront the student, give him/her a chance to explain. You must listen to the student's explanation if you take any disciplinary action. This is a matter of necessary due process expected of school personnel in dealing with disciplinary situations.

You must listen, but you don't have to agree or get involved in an argument.

If a student becomes argumentative or repetitious, end the conversation by saying something like this: "I've heard your response. If there is nothing new you can say, we needn't go on. I'll let you know what I'm going to do about this when I've made a decision."

CONTACTING PARENTS

In almost all cases of cheating it is best to contact the parents. Be ready to explain what behaviors indicate cheating has taken place. Ask them to deal with the moral aspect of cheating with the student. Tell the parent you are calling to get information about the student in general which might be useful in knowing how to deal with the academic aspect of the situation.

Let them know that you will deal with the incident as a school discipline problem. If you don't know what you will do about the situation, don't feel you must decide while you are on the phone.

Let them know that you've talked with the class prior to the incident about how you define cheating and how you will handle it.

The conversation might sound like this: "This is Mary Green of Sunset High School. We've had a problem during our math test. Ralph was using crib notes (or better "Ralph admits to using crib notes") on the test. We'll deal with the discipline aspect here at school, but I'd like to ask your help in two ways; Would you please deal with the moral aspects raised by the situation. I think it's better for the parent to deal with that. And can you tell me anything I should consider while I decide what to do here at school about this?"

If the conversation is anything but straightforward, if the parents are anything but supportive, if the potential for misunderstanding is too large, then ask the parent to come to school for a face to face conference. Don't try to handle a messy situation over the telephone.

It is also useful to inform the school counselor of problems with cheating. The counselor should help the student think about what caused the cheating and how to deal with those pressures in a positive way. Don't expect the counselor to make the first confrontation with the student, to contact the parents or to administer a punishment. That's your responsibility as the teacher. Avoid the idea that you can "turn over" the incident to anyone.

SELECTING A RESPONSE

Don't feel compelled to make a decision about a response to an incident of cheating until you've been able to gather information about the student and the situation.

Ask the administrative vice-principal about any past problem with the student.

Get ideas about appropriate responses from colleagues (other teachers of similiar subjects or students, your department head, staff development people, administrators) and parents.

Check with the counselor about information you might need in selecting a response.

Consider the impact (both positive and negative) your reaction will have on other students.

A MENU OF POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO CHEATING

Here is a partial list of some responses to cheating some staff members have used. In general they would be used in addition to the phone calls you make to the parents of students involved. They may or may not fit your needs. In many cases a combination of these may be used.

---Give the student a different test or a different type of test. Substitute an essay for an objective test. Give oral questions. Add questions to verify answers.

---Make the student do the assignment over with a slight difference: different questions, different problems, a different topic etc. Have the student assigned to the prep room for the length of time it should take to finish the assignment.

---Lower the student's grade on that assignment or test. Average this grade in with his other grades for the quarter.

---Give the student a zero on the assignment or test and average this grade into the other grades for the quarter. If this causes a lowering of his quarter or semester grade, so be it.

---Assign the student to the prep room or to work for you after school for the time you had to put into detecting and dealing with the incident.

---If the student is a good writer or good verbally, ask him/her to do a report, either written or oral, on honesty, ethics, trust, or the implications when people can't be trusted. Have him/her present this to you after school and be ready to discuss it.

--- Refuse to give recommendations for college or employment to students who cheat. (But don't write in a recommendation that a student has been caught cheating. If you can't say anything nice. Don't say anything. Give the form back to the student.)

--- Recommend suspension (in or out of school) to the vice-principal.

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